

“Why a UBI testing on a municipal basis is relevant for Germany”

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The FRIBIS team Expedition Basic Income wants to test which basic income variant would be best suited to our German society. This is being achieved within the framework of a large-scale, nationwide, state-funded pilot project. Another goal of the group is to include means of direct democracy to ensure that the public is included in the decision-making processes. Thus, the NGO Expedition Grundeinkommen started collecting signatures all over Germany from people who want to help their town or municipality qualify for the pilot project. If at least one per cent of the population of the municipality or city have signed such a plea, then a proposal of a UBI pilot is brought in front of the local councils.

However, this pilot program is by far not the first pilot that tests UBI on a municipal level, in fact there are numerous UBI pilots that are either completed, planned or in progress in the US (Crisp et al. 2022) which are conducted on a municipal level. Therefore, to determine how scientifically and financially prudent it is to conduct a new UBI pilot study in the light of all the results there are from past UBI experiments, the most notable UBI experiments of the last 60 years in industrialized or partly industrialized countries need to be analysed. I analysed this in detail in my contribution to the 2021 FRIBIS annual conference (cf. März forthcoming).

The result of this analyses is surprisingly clear and in line of the argumentation of the NGO Expedition Grundeinkommen (cf. Expedition Grundeinkommen 2021). After looking at all the major pilot projects that tested a full UBI given to all groups of society in upper middle and high-income countries, the paper could not find one study that would invalidate the need to conduct such a pilot program in Germany. There is promising UBI research currently conducted

by NGO Mein Grundeinkommen and a Pilot program proposal in Scotland. These, however, can rather be seen as complementary to the proposal from Expedition Grundeinkommen. The study of Mein Grundeinkommen does not study the entire spectrum of age groups but focuses its research on the 21 to 40-year old cohort. The Pilot program proposal in Scotland is envisioned to be conducted in 4 cities. Not as random control trial as the UBI pilot project of the Expedition is designed, but as a saturation study with its pros and cons.

Even though, older and currently ongoing UBI pilots do not negate the validity of conducting the proposed UBI pilot, that does not mean that it cannot learn from the work of other UBI pilot programs. The pilot from Mein Grundeinkommen has a very well-thought-out research design that can be seen as a good example of field research. The Scottish BI pilot conducted thorough feasibility studies to ensure a successful implementation of their future UBI pilot projects. Furthermore, the Mayors for a Guaranteed Income Network connects different cities in the US which either have running UBI trials or advocate for such. The networking effects in terms of a sharing of know-how, experiences but also the combining of efforts to lobby for an introduction of UBI on a federal level, are of immense value and are, therefore, also something desirable for the future interaction of the different municipalities in Germany that are envisioned to test UBI.

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